



State Senator

Neal J. Kedzie

11th Senate District

Testimony on Senate Bill 554
Senator Neal Kedzie
Senate Committee on Transportation, Tourism,
Forestry and Natural Resources
April 1, 2010

Senator Holperin, members of the Committee, thank you for holding a public hearing today on Senate Bill 554.

Senate Bill 554 requires that, beginning in 2016, that at least four members of the board hold a hunting, fishing or trapping license in at least 7 of the 10 previous years before they are nominated. In addition, the bill requires that at least one member have an agriculture background, one member have a business background, and one have an environmental background. Further, the bill requires the Governor to nominate an individual as secretary of the Department who has held a hunting or fishing license in at least 3 of the 5 previous years before the nomination.

In 1967, the Conservation Department and the Department of Resource Development combined to become the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). During that time, the Legislature created the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board to provide guidance to the Department on various conservation and environmental issues. While there were boards and commissions advising on related policies before then, the present-day Board now controls all such matters.

The Board has the ability to form policies which have the effect of law, impacting businesses, farmers, developers, hunters, anglers, outdoor enthusiasts of all types, and individual property owners. Of course, none may be implemented without the approval of the Legislature, but this quasi-legislative body certainly has a great deal of power to advance the overall agenda of the DNR.

The policies these seven, unelected individuals are entrusted to craft and promote affect the air we breathe, water we drink, and rules and regulations we must follow, as well as a whole host of interests including forestry, fisheries, wildlife management, agriculture, and industry, just to name a few.

While Board members typically have some familiarity or background in natural resources matters, there are no specific requirements codified in state law, other than three members reside in the northern half of the state and three reside in the southern half of the state; one member serves at large.

Conversely, the vast majority of the nearly 200 state boards and councils that exist have detailed membership requirements. For example, I serve on the 17 member Wisconsin Environmental Education Board, which all 17 positions are delineated under state law. Along with four legislators, one from each party in each house, there are four state agency heads, and the UW President is responsible for appointing members that falls into nine specific categories listed in state statute.

Because the Department of Natural Resources is one of, if not the most, influential state agency, I strongly believe that the Legislature should establish criteria for it's membership ensuring the board properly reflects the diverse interests regulated by the Department.

While many disagreed on the issue of the appointment of the Department Secretary, the one theme I constantly heard during that debate was the need to get politics out of the Department. In my opinion, the best way to do that is to ensure that Board is not only reflective of Wisconsin's diverse population, but reflective of those people whose interests and activities are governed by the Board.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and I would be happy to answer any question you may have.